

[Artist--Old School]

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DATE: SEP 14 1940 ARTIST -- OLD SCHOOL

He was an old man of medium size with a face carved in lines of dignity and strength. The brow was broad and calm, the eyes still hold a light in their blue depths. He looked like a man who had found and used the right key to life, controlled his spirit and conquered his trade. A man who had lived and was not afraid to die.

The wife of Donegal looked older, but in her faded eyes was the same courage and faith. She sat rocking and watching her husband with quiet pride. Donegal smoked his pipe slowly and spoke with a Scottish burr.

"We are believers in God," he said. "We were brought up so in Scotland, and with us it has lasted. Today many people believe in nothing. I feel sorry for them."

Their home was a clapboard cottage with a steep shingled roof, set near the slope of a hill. Vines draped the porch and a little flower garden colored the front yard. At the side of the cottage was a vegetable garden, and on the hillside were a few apple trees.

"We came from near Aberdeen in Scotland," he said. "Lord but it was a long time ago, Mary. We were married there. Mary was part Irish and her family had no wish to see her married to such as me. But we did it just the same and we sailed for this country. I had no craving for a split skull from an Irish 2 shillalegh."

"Ah, yes!" laughed the little woman. "You was awful afraid, you was. You fair trembled till safe on the ship and out to sea," Then: "In them days he would've welcomed a bit of a brawl, Donegal would!"

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"I'm a peace-loving man," he protested, "I have always been, and will so till the end. You know that, woman."

She hissed some soft exclamation of denial: "I know," she said. "When you was courting me you was forever boasting and bragging on how many you had belted in the pub on Saturday nights."

"That was to impress the Irish in you," said Donegal. "Knowing how the Irish love fighting so well."

"Oh you was a wild one all right, maybe in your early youth. But I must admit that you settled down, and young too, when I converted you to a sober and Godly life. All from the influence of me."

"Be still, woman," said Donegal with a smile. "Enough of your Irish fairy tales. We would talk man's talk here, and only the truth."

"I learned the stone cutting trade in Scotland when I was in my 'teens. But Mary and I was both of a mind to get away to a new country, though love of the old we have never lost. There were the menfolks of her family aching to lay me by the heels, and I knew it. And from America came letters telling of this great country with all its jobs. They said a carver like myself would make a fortune in no time over here. Well, whether I believed it or not, over we came — and poor little 3 Mary was sick on the trip across."

"We had cousins whose forefathers had settled Caledonia County here in Vermont. You know of the Scottish settlements in Ryegate, Barnet, St. Johnsbury — on the east side of the state by the Connecticut River. So from Montreal we went there and stayed a time, but it was not what we wanted. There was granite quarrying in Ryegate, but it was a disappointment to me. I kept hearing tales of the big sheds in Concord, New Hampshire; in Quincy, Massachusetts; and in Barre. The people of Ryegate were more for farming the

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land, dairying and such. I was no farmer, although since I left off work I have taken to this small garden of ours.

“We went on to Quincy and that was not to our liking either, being like the other extreme of Ryegate. We were lonely there in some way. Then we tried Concord and I worked there until a letter came from a good friend of mine working in barre, telling of the coming of the Scottish cutters there; saying the stone was by way of being the best ever, and just the stone for a carver like myself to work on. Fine stone with a fine grain, hard but not brittle. So it was to barre we came, and we have been here since that time. At the turn of the century it was, as I remember. Barre was filled and swarming with stonecutters from Italy, Spain, Scotland, and Ireland. There was never trouble of getting a job, and if you would leave one place for some reason or other, more jobs were waiting.

“It was a wild unsettled time, and there were many rough wild men came to work on the granite. Some sent back home for their families and settled down here, steady and good. Others had no thought of settling down, but came only for the big money, the drinking, the good times. Then they would go away to cut stone some other place, leaving behind a bad name and maybe some girl a-weeping. There were fights, there were dark deeds and stormy times. The people born here blamed us all for what the bad ones did. There were many solemn and dour ones among the natives here, just as there are among the Scottish countryfolks. They couldn't understand the noisy fun and loudness of the Italians and Spaniards or the brawling of the Irish. It was all new to them. They did not like it. Their peaceful little country village become a madhouse. But it brought money, business, prosperity, wealth, the granite did, and no man can go about denying it. All profited alike — farmers, landowners, storekeepers, business men, every one. Still they did not like at first, the native folks for the most. They looked upon us like an army of invaders. But we had our trade to work at, our steady money coming in, our own countrymen and friends, and our own pride of self and country. So we did not mind it so much. And it changed as time went on. People mingled more and became friends.

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"I was a fair enough carver, so they say. But I was never with the best of them. The best ones came from Italy. No better workmen maybe, but with more of the, artist in them, more of the inspiration. Like the old time sculptors, they were. One of the finest, a slim fair Italian, a statue-cutter — he died at thirty, or younger. He had beauty in himself, he could put it into the stone. All of the best ones are gone now. The last real one, the best one left, had to stop working a time 5 ago. They do everything by machines now. It still needs workmen of skill, but not the artists. They are gone, once and for all.

"It's the way things change, that is all. Everything changes the same way. Machines take the place of men, and men go without work, and hungry...

"That is the curse of the world today — the machines, and everywhere men out of work. That makes for unhappiness and misery and trouble. Take away a man's job and you kill the man. Maybe the dust killed them, but being without work kills them inside — a worse way.

"And the young people are hurt too. They finish with school and what is there for them? If they do find work the pay is small, too small. They can save no money. They can put no money in the bank. They cannot get ahead. They cannot afford to get married. What are they going to do? I don't know...

"I still look for hope and the best. Something will happen. Something must happen. God forbid it will have to be war again for this country. We must have patience and faith. Sometimes it's not easy, for the young especially not. It is a lesson that only the years can teach.

"I am not sorry now to sit aside and watch the world go by. It goes too fast, it has gone ahead too fast. That is the great wrong. The minds of men have raced ahead more than the Good Lord meant for them, and now men are paying for this.

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“We have been happy enough here, Mary and I. We still talk and think of Scotland, people do not forget the homeland. 6 But now, it is too far, too late to go back. And we might be like strangers there, and it would hurt to feel so in your own land. So we'll stay on here, and all for the best, I think. With the bombs falling like rain on the british Isles.

“There is a lot of talk about Barre still being wild and bad. I do not think it much different from any other place. People are much the same everywhere. Maybe there are more nationalities here, more mixed-up. But still they are men and women and children, and not no different one from another. I read in a book once about this young man, a hunted man he was. And he came to this peaceful village like a village in a dream. There was a little white church over the town, and a graveyard beside it. The boy had never seen such a quiet place of peace. And all the people had pleasant faces. To read it would make you want to go there. Well, he asked a woman if the folks there were not kinder and happier and more lawful than in other places. She answered him: 'No. I think they are much like all people everywhere. We have men who like to much drink; we have girls who get babies without being married; we have people who steal and cheat and lie. Just like anywhere in the world.' She accepted that — as we all must accept it. There are still the fine people too.

“That is how I feel about Barre and the people of Barre. It does not look like that village in the book. Ay, it may look like the opposite, as you know. But the people here are the same as there — or anywhere you go. No worse or no better, on the whole. That is another lesson it takes the years to teach.”